



Minister for Mental Health Weekly Report

Week commencing 18 March 2024
prepared on 13 March 2024

PROACTIVELY RELEASED

Contents

1	Health system strategy	3
1.1	Budget 2024	3
2	Mental health	4
2.1	Mental health and wellbeing of Rainbow communities	4
2.2	Overview of older people’s mental health	6
2.3	Publications.....	8
2.3.1	Other upcoming events, publications and announcements.....	8

PROACTIVELY RELEASED

1 Health system strategy

1.1 Budget 2024

On 11 March 2024, the Minister of Health met with the Minister of Finance for the Budget 2024 bilateral meeting. We provided you and the Minister of Health with material to support that discussion on the Vote Health package [H2024037061 refers]. Following the bilateral meeting, we provided you and the Minister of Health with a briefing to confirm the in-principle decisions on changes to the Vote Health Budget 2024 package [H2024037497 refers].

Next steps

Later in March 2024, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance will receive joint Ministry-Treasury advice on multi-year funding for cost pressures, including risks and mitigations.

The upcoming key milestones include:

- Financial recommendations due 16 April
- Final Cabinet agreement to Budget 2024 package on 29 April 2024.

We will continue to provide you with material and support you through this process.

Deputy Director-General	Maree Roberts, Deputy Director-General, Strategy, Policy and Legislation - Te Pou Rautaki, s 9(2)(a)
--------------------------------	--

PROACTIVELY RELEASED

2 Mental health

2.1 Mental health and wellbeing of Rainbow communities

This item provides information on rainbow mental health and wellbeing. It forms part of a series of Weekly Report items on priority population groups and complements a Weekly Report entry on 14 March 2024 from Health New Zealand on mental health services available to rainbow communities. It is relevant to your responsibilities as Minister for Mental Health, but also includes information that falls within scope of your Associate Health portfolio for rainbow health.

Statistics on the mental health of rainbow communities

Rainbow communities are more likely to experience poorer mental health including: higher rates of psychological distress, self-harm, discrimination and bullying, and social exclusion compared to the general population.¹ Negative mental health statistics are higher for transgender and non-binary people.² New Zealand data on rainbow communities shows that:

- rainbow adults were two times more likely to have daily feelings of anxiety or depression compared to the general population (New Zealand Household Economic Survey, Stats NZ 2020-21)
- five out of every seven trans and non-binary participants (71%) reported high or very high psychological distress (2019 Counting Ourselves Survey)
- for rainbow young people, 78% felt overwhelmed, 72.5% felt life was not worth living, 55.3% thought about attempting suicide, and 26.3% had attempted suicide (2021 Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey, Ministry of Social Development)
- across all ages, 56% said they had hurt themselves on purpose in the past 12 months, 29% had planned how they would kill themselves, and 10% had tried to kill themselves (2022 Identify Survey)
- rainbow identifying adults were five times more likely than heterosexual adults to have been the victim of one or more sexual assaults in the previous 12 months (2019/2020 New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey, Ministry of Justice).

Important areas for supporting the mental health of rainbow communities

Some of the mental health disparities experienced by rainbow communities is related to discrimination that rainbow communities encounter across the wider determinants of health and wellbeing. Key areas that have been identified by research and community engagement to reduce disparities and improve mental health include:

- supporting rainbow community organisations and peer-led rainbow-specific support services to provide affirming environments and help people and their whānau through specific life stages including coming out, changing gender expression, and accessing gender-affirming health services
- upskilling workforces through rainbow competency training to understand and meet the needs of rainbow communities
- addressing discrimination, harassment, and hate speech, particularly towards transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse New Zealanders

¹ Clark, T. C., Lucassen, M. F. G., Bullen, P., Denny, S. J., Fleming, T. M., Robinson, E. M., & Rossen, F. V. (2014). The health and well-being of transgender high school students: Results from the New Zealand Adolescent Health Survey (Youth'12). *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, 55(1), 93–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.11.008>

² Fenaughty, J., Ker, A., Alansari, M., Besley, T., Kerekere, E., Pasley, A., Saxton, P., Subramanian, P., Thomsen, P. & Veale, J. (2021). Identify survey: Community and advocacy report. Identify Survey Team.

- increasing inclusion and safety in school settings which includes addressing bullying, supporting diversity groups or queer-straight alliances, delivering youth health services, and resourcing health education and comprehensive sexuality education.

Access to health care and gender affirming health care

A focus of the health system is to ensure that services are inclusive, safe, and easily accessible to all, which includes access to gender affirming health care for rainbow communities. Gender affirming care incorporates a range of health supports to affirm people’s own gender identity. This may include puberty blockers, hormones, laser hair removal, voice therapy, counselling and social supports, and surgeries. Not all people will want these options, and some may only want a few.

For rainbow communities, 17% reported they had needed to access health care but could not access it, and 28% had tried to access gender affirming medication but could not access it. Almost one in 10 participants had been treated unfairly by a health care professional because of their rainbow identity (2022 Identify Survey).

For transgender and non-binary communities, 19% could not access hormone treatment, 67% could not access chest reconstruction surgery, and 50% could not access voice therapy. Over a third (36%) had avoided seeing a doctor because they were worried about disrespect or mistreatment as a trans or non-binary person (2019 Counting Ourselves Survey).

Work underway by the Ministry of Health to support rainbow communities’ mental health

The Ministry of Health is working to improve outcomes for population groups that experience disproportionate and unfair physical and mental health outcomes. Developing the Pae Ora health strategies included engagement with rainbow communities and their input features in all strategies.

Kia Manawanui Aotearoa: Long-term pathway to mental wellbeing and the Oranga Hinengaro System and Service Framework also acknowledges the unique mental wellbeing needs of rainbow communities. The System and Service Framework sets the expectation that there should be a broader range of population-specific mental health and addiction services in those areas with sufficient population size and need. For groups experiencing inequities who do not have access to local population-specific services, there should be national consultation and advisory services to enhance and support delivery by other services. This includes for the rainbow and takatāpui community.

Other activities underway by the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand to support rainbow communities include:

- an evidence review of puberty blockers, led by the Ministry of Health
- an engagement platform with the rainbow community to include their voices in the design, delivery, and performance of the health system (Te Pae Tata action)
- implementing the HIV Action Plan to eliminate both local HIV transmission and ensure people living with HIV have healthy lives free from stigma and discrimination
- improving access to primary care for transgender and non-binary people, including the establishment of tailored models of care, development of national gender-affirming healthcare guidelines, and training and workforce resources
- developing a rights-based approach to health care for intersex children and young people to prevent unnecessary medical intervention on intersex children.

Next steps

We can discuss with you any details regarding rainbow communities’ mental health and wellbeing in New Zealand and can provide further advice at your request.

<p>Deputy Director-General</p>	<p>Robyn Shearer, Deputy Director-General, Clinical, Community and Mental Health - Te Pou Whakakaha, s 9(2)(a)</p>
---------------------------------------	--

2.2 Overview of older people's mental health

This item provides information on the mental health of older people. This is part of a series of items providing information on population groups of interest.

Context

Currently, around 875,000 people (17% of the New Zealand population) are over 65 years old. This is predicted to increase by 50% over the next 15 years, with the percentage over 75 years old increasing by 75%.

The New Zealand Health Survey indicates that older people have high levels of life satisfaction (particularly in the 65 to 74 age group) and relatively lower levels of depression. In 2022/23, high/very high psychological distress was experienced by 5.7% of those aged 65 to 74 years, and 6.1% of those 75 years and over, while in contrast it was 21.2% for those 15 to 24 years.³ However, older people's unique vulnerabilities and complex health needs mean that problems with mental health and substances can go unrecognised and tend to be underestimated.

Older people who are unwell, in hospital, or living in aged care or residential facilities are most affected by mental ill-health. Dementia prevalence is higher for Māori and Pacific peoples, yet they are less likely to receive funded anti-dementia medication. Further, 17% of older people in New Zealand experience social connection vulnerability, which increases significantly with age.⁴ Loneliness is associated with depression, cognitive decline, serious illness, and suicidality.

Key government strategies related to older people

The Ministry's Healthy Ageing Strategy 2016-2026 includes a vision that "older people live well, age well and have a respectful end-of-life in age-friendly communities". It notes the importance of building mental resilience as people age, reducing mental health stigma, improving early identification of mental ill-health, and ensuring access to mental health support in communities.

In concert with this, the New Zealand Health Strategy 2023 sets a ten-year direction that includes the expectation for agencies to support independence in older people and protect against frailty. It acknowledges that an ageing population will increase demand on health services, and emphasises age friendly communities, early intervention, access to services, and support for socially isolated older people.

Kia Manawanui Aotearoa: Long-term pathway to mental wellbeing and the Oranga Hinengaro System and Service Framework acknowledge older people as a population with specific mental health and addiction needs.

Health agencies are part of Ministry of Social Development (MSD)-led cross-agency action related to the Better Later Life Strategy 2019-2034, and associated Action Plan 2021-2024, which includes work to improve support for socially isolated people and to prevent elder abuse. Various other Ministerial portfolios impact on the mental wellbeing of older people, such as housing, where severe housing deprivation within the older population is significant.

Health system services and supports for older people's mental health and addiction

Primary care and community organisations provide continuity of care, and care agencies provide home care supports. Secondary care specialist teams provide direct patient care and support services in and outside of public hospitals for patients (and their whānau) who are severely affected by their condition. Older people can access district addiction service provided for all adults.

Many people with mental health conditions reside in rest homes and long-stay hospitals. Dementia units and psychogeriatric units provide for people who require a high level of nursing care and management for challenging behaviours. Health New Zealand can provide further information on mental health and addiction services for older people if required.

³ The survey includes usual residents of aged-care facilities but not those in hospital level care

⁴ <https://swa.govt.nz/assets/Document-Library/Older-people-vulnerability-and-multiple-disadvantage.pdf>

Mental health and addiction issues for older people

Older people have mental wellbeing challenges that differ from other ages, such as stress from degenerative physical health and conditions like dementia. They may experience: stigma; ageism; marginalisation; lack of access to information; and barriers to accessing services, such as cost, transport, and computer literacy.

Access to care and support services varies across the country, with a range of service models and varying approaches to data collection on service provision. Local research has suggested the number of inpatient psychogeriatric beds is significantly below levels recommended in international research.⁵ Insufficient beds can result in unnecessary admissions to general hospital and increased stress for patients and caregivers.

Other issues include:

- older people staying in hospitals longer than necessary (eg, due to shortages of home care support and assessment services, and lack of coordination with primary, community, and aged residential care)
- current models of care are not fit for the needs of this population
- diagnostic and clinical care pathways for young onset dementia are often unclear
- anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, and sedatives are overused (with insufficient talking therapy), and medicines no longer required are not discontinued
- there is an increase in use of illicit/non-prescribed cannabis for those aged 65-74, although usage is still lower than for younger ages
- more culturally appropriate services and supports are needed
- there are workforce training needs and workforce shortages, particularly psychiatrists.

Current work

The Government Policy Statement and New Zealand Health Plan, under development, will set directions and actions that will include support for older populations. Current Health New Zealand work includes a review of aged care funding and service models (which will include psychogeriatric facilities), the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan, and a focus on paid whānau and family care.

Cross-agency work of relevance includes advice to the Minister for Social Development at the end of March 2024 on a Social Wellbeing Agency report on older people experiencing multiple disadvantages. We will update you on any mental health and addiction-related findings.

On 7 March 2024, the Aged Care Commissioner released a report on health and disability system performance.⁶ It includes concern about decreased psychogeriatric beds (and no psychogeriatric level care in private sector new builds), geographic inequities, insufficient kaupapa Māori care, and a need to increase the psychogeriatric workforce. The Ministry will be working with Health New Zealand to provide a response to the report.

The mental health and addiction workforce centre, Te Pou, has held symposiums on issues for older people in 2022 and 2023. We understand you may be invited to a third event on 15 May 2024.

Next steps

We will continue collaborative work to support the mental health of older people, which also links to the aged care and dementia responsibilities of Hon Casey Costello as Associate Minister of Health. We will keep you updated on activity and can provide further information if you wish to attend the Te Pou May 2024 event.

Deputy Director-General	Robyn Shearer, Deputy Director-General, Clinical, Community and Mental Health - Te Pou Whakakaha, s 9(2)(a)
-------------------------	---

⁵ Copeland, B., Barak, Y., & Cheung, G. (2023). The 2023 New Zealand psychiatry of old age services and workforce survey. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 10398562231180486.

⁶ https://www.hdc.org.nz/media/o3tb5dfa/amplifying-the-voices-of-older-people-across-aotearoa-new-zealand-march_2024.pdf

IN CONFIDENCE

2.3 Publications

2.3.1 Other upcoming events, publications and announcements

Upcoming events, publications, and announcements				
Title	Date	Context	ELT contact	Minister
Publication of New Zealand Health Survey module results on mental health and problematic substance use	May 2024 <i>(subsequently updated to June 2024)</i>	A data explorer (an interactive online tool) and supporting reports present survey results on mental health status, risk of problematic substance use, informal help-seeking and access to mental health and addictions services for both adults and children. Results from the 2016/17 New Zealand Health Survey are compared to the 2021-23 New Zealand Health Surveys.	Dean Rutherford, Deputy Director General, Evidence, Research, and Innovation – Te Pou Whakamārama, s 9(2)(a)	Hon Matt Doocoy

PROACTIVELY RELEASED